his village saved the old hammer and sickle and flew it privately on special occasions. His cousins in the army learned old, secret marches. Now there was also the Russian Mafia, the most corrupt but least discredited force for social cohesion in the entire Russian Federation. A sociologist would have attributed that to the strength of its collective fictions. Men of honour, etc. Serge was always writing flaky "agit prop" screen plays about Russian gangsters and other great sinners. Only God loved sinners more.

Serge's girlfriend drove a Volkswagen. It was a classic yellow beetle, expensive. The girlfriend was very Anglo Saxon, tall with long blond hair. She was very severe, for a former Comrade.

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One night in the smoking lounge I heard Frederick (not Fred) circumstantially describe what had happened to Mildred. He'd given her money for a blowjob, enough for a pack of cigarettes. At least I hope it was a pack. When Mildred got back from the Korean grocery store Frederick (not Fred) thought the least she could do was offer him a smoke. When she refused, he told Serge that Mildred had robbed him at knife-point. Serge was naïve enough to believe him, or maybe he wanted to believe him, and called the police. No one else believed him, but everyone supported him, because by then they all wanted to get rid of